



## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

1488 FRANKLIN STREET • ROCKY MOUNT, VA 24151

BUSINESS: (540) 483-3091 • FAX: (540) 483-3086 • EMERGENCY: 9-1-1

Daryl L. Hatcher  
Director

Billy Ferguson  
Division Chief, Operations

Marvin Woods  
Captain, Animal Control

Bennie R. Russell  
Fire Marshal

### **PRESS RELEASE**

On Thursday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, a problem with the E-911 system required the first county-wide use of the County's Citizens Alerting System. The Citizen's Alerting System was implemented in 2009 by Franklin County to provide a means of notifying citizens of emergency situations and to relay emergency instructions pertaining to an event. Although the system had been utilized several times for much smaller incidents that affected specific neighborhoods, the system had never been utilized to provide a mass notification of citizens.

During the E911 outage on April 28, tornadoes that struck southwest Virginia damaged equipment that handles E911 calls for several counties in south-central Virginia, which included Franklin County. Sheriff Ewell Hunt manages the E911 center for Franklin County. He was notified of the outage and notified county emergency management officials of the problem. Since the phone company could not provide an estimated time that the E911 lines would be repaired, a decision was made to use the Citizen's Alerting System to notify citizens of the situation and to provide instructions to contact police, fire, and emergency medical services using alternate phone lines to the E911 center.

The Citizens Alerting System uses a subscription service from a very large call center capable of making 768 simultaneous phone calls. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, the system was activated at approximately 6 pm and began sending the message informing citizens of the problems with the E911 system. Some 25,812 telephones throughout the County were called over the following 2 hours with 3,680 messages left on answering machines and 15,821 calls answered by a person. The system is designed to call up to 3 times if there is no answer or the system receives a busy signal. After 3 attempts, the system gives up trying to call. The system also sent text and email messages to those citizens that have registered their devices with the county. This service is provided to allow citizens to register their cell phones, pagers or email addresses so that notifications such as this one can be provided to those that may not have a home phone or be away from home during an emergency. Citizens may register such devices by going to the County's website at [www.franklincountyva.org](http://www.franklincountyva.org).

"We're sure the use of the system surprised and confused many folks" said Bill Agee, Director of the Franklin County E911 Center. "The Emergency Communications Center was extremely busy for a few hours with citizens calling to see what was happening and asking if the call was a hoax. After we assured them it was not a hoax and if they needed us in an emergency, they should call our administrative line, most callers completely understood."

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